

FANTASY OF FREEDOM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF WILLIAM

BURROUGHS' *THE WILD BOYS*

B. THAVASEELAN & R. RAMAKRISHNAN

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vels University (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

*This paper endeavours to analyse the path of fantasy of freedom in William Burroughs' *The Wild Boys*. In *Wild Boys*, Burroughs expresses his view that freedom can be achieved through fantasy by means of various film tools like-film imagery, film metaphors etc. The cut-up has been used extensively, but with sequential narratives importing more or less the same thematic message. The experimentalists like Burroughs are of the view that the dreams are the source of demonstrating the absolute freedom of the imagination. There is no need for them to use it for expressing vision as the dreams liberate or set free the imagination in time and space and also allows for a highly personal symbolic system. The preoccupation with fantasy in the twentieth-century literature leads to an examination of 'reality' as well, and both have led to an examination of that culture which opposes fantasy and reality, which defines each by the exclusion of the other. How fantasy differs from reality is contained in the brand of that culture which forms the western civilization. It is a futuristic fantasy of violence and chaos produced by complicated acts and sexual conflicts. Here also Burroughs watches men and women at war for the reproduction and survival of the new life forms.*

KEYWORDS: *Culture, Imagination, Freedom & Fantasy*

Received: Dec 07, 2018; **Accepted:** Dec 27, 2018; **Published:** Jan 14, 2019; **Paper Id.:** IJELFEB20194

INTRODUCTION

Several writers, critics and reviewers continue to describe William Burroughs as the leader of the Beat Generation in spite of his express denial. Some writers are strongly of this opinion that Burroughs continuously attempts to expose the world of those inhabited by the beaten, tortured, and neglected and addicts of all kinds. All are being controlled by the existing hypocritical institutions led by the degraded authorities or the virus which encloses a very wide sense. Before proceeding to discuss this term more elaborately, it is essential to remember that Burroughs belongs to the group of a very few writers identified and described, as Beat writers. Though Burroughs was also influenced by Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, the latter regarded him as his greatest teacher. Burroughs himself admits that they were friends and he introduced them to the classical writings and the writers like Shakespeare, Rimbaud, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, etc.

Burroughs' most influential novel, *The Wild Boys* (1971), is another fantastic parody typical of Burroughs. In an interview with Robert Palmer in *Rolling Stone* (1972), Burroughs himself states that *The Wild Boys* represents a significant departure from *Naked Lunch* and the trilogy, but here he tries to maintain that the freedom from all sorts of bondages is possible through fantasy. No doubt this second mythology has also been constructed on the autobiographical basis representing Burroughs' wild mind. In other words, *Wild Boys* is clearly meant to be a movie of Burroughs' mind, "Billy, B. St. Lowis Encephalitis," records the "1920 St. Lewis boyhood of Audrey, 'whom everyone humiliated because he looked like a homosexual sheep killing dog, and who went to

kindergartens like mental heroes. Burroughs, for years the undergrounds' loudest voice against social, political and sexual repression, writes in *The Wild Boys* about packs of homosexual guerrillas dedicated to destroying people. The book has greater unity of subject matter than any other and there appear to be an inner conflict of the author himself. Burroughs gives a new direction to the novel in its themes as well as style.

Even his second mythology in *The Wild Boys* does not exempt the major themes of his earlier works like addiction, control systems and the quest to free oneself from bondages. But, on the contrary, it adds to it - the emphasis on politics a sexual fantasy of the wild generation. In *The Wild Boys*, the attention is given to man's positive potential for autonomy, regeneration and creation. The theme of regeneration and creation is itself associated with the basic metaphor of sexuality in the novel. Burroughs himself believes that the output of his earlier writings with a shocking accurateness is the outcome of his drug experiences. His fifteen years drug addiction enabled him to write the exact experiences during the hallucinatory period. In the same way, his childhood memories and sexual fantasies of adolescence contributed to the second mythology of his work. Therefore, it can be maintained that such fantasies and dreams too, can lead to surreal visions resulting in artistic work by the authors. In other words, the creation of any art is formed through fantasies born in the mind of the creator. Hence; Burroughs holds the view that this creation is possible only for a writer who has a strong media of expression - the language. But, if he remains free from the bondage of word-and-image or language, he can create many new worlds through one piece of composition. For Burroughs, a writer has the greatest artistic ability of all other artists.

In his earlier works, sex has been locked upon as an addiction as well as control system on human-beings. Both the addiction and control system either result in life forms and death, which has been called the Biologic trap by Burroughs. But in *The Wild Boys*, the sexual fantasies are a source of artistic creation for a writer. The obsessional ideas due to the bondage, death-like and repressive experiences are balanced and compensated by the sexual fantasies providing pleasure and freedom. Hence, the second mythology maintained and developed in *The Wild Boys* is that freedom is possible through fantasy. On the contrary, the whole concept now seems to be a fantasy because to such fantasies formed and expressed by any writer, also need the language the word-and-image. The exact expression of the formed fantasies is not possible at all without language which is the only media for a writer. For the same reason, Burroughs is able to merge his personal fantasies with mass-media fantasies, by using the narrative style as well as the characters, images and actions of the pulps. These fantasies, in fact, express basic human desires for individual autonomy, freedom and rebirth.

In *The Wild Boys*, the whole structure is more narrative rather than the development through cut-ups. He himself states that he has chosen to use fewer cutups in the later work, returning to more conventional narrative prose. In *William S Burroughs*, Jennie Skerl writes,

I feel that in all those books (the trilogy) there was too much undifferentiated cut-up material which I eliminated in *The Wild Boys*. The cut-up technique has very specific uses... In *The Wild Boys*, I was really quite deliberately returning to older style of writing quite a bit of it is really 19th Century. It's a different style of writing. (76)

The book contains eighteen brief routines consisting of narrative sequences. One of the narratives called Penny Arcade Peep Show (38-49) explains the structure of the book. The five different "Penny Arcade Peep Shows" are the fragments of the cut-ups arranged in between the narratives. It's obvious that the film metaphor has been clarified by Burroughs in the novel.

The autobiographical images of Burroughs convey the theme of his quest. He incorporates gradually the characters of the earlier work along with the new ones - all showing the changing identity of the author himself. In the mythology of *The Wild Boys*, the writer receives greater importance and respect that creates stories out of Impression laid by reality and fantasies imparting pleasure and a sense of freedom. Therefore, it is here on one ground that Burroughs cannot be agreed with; that is, to free oneself from the bondage of the reality or past or death. Whatever personal is blended into the fantastical composition, most of them are the experiences of the writer himself binding him to the past. As a result, it can be said that Burroughs' suggestion of being free from the bondage of past or reality is a mere prescription without any positive result. The simplicity of this myth reveals the limited power of Burroughs, who suggests freeing oneself from the past by controlling the dreams.

Another interesting view that he holds is that the aforementioned freedom is possible only by *The Wild Boys*- the coming generation - the relics of those people who do not know their past because they never existed before. Actually, they are just the creations of the author who expects their arrival in the future. At the same time, it makes obvious that Burroughs totally fails to recognize the present - the real; or perhaps he pretends so in order to forget the past. For the same reason, he continues with his fantasies depicting the events to happen in the future- the future, which is indefinite serving the purpose of being free from the reality bondage.

Burroughs' heroes are "wild boys," a whole generation, "that felt neither the pain nor pleasure" Wild boys live in an emotional nowhere with no "emotions oxygen." They have no memory because they have no past - some of them are born through a process of replication; they spring full grown from another man, vibrate into life, and immediately begin having intercourse with their creator without desire or loathing. In these surreal scenes Burroughs tries to purge all the old self images from memory, all the hate that fester in his characters' mind. In Burroughs' film-land, memory and emotion can be exploded away. When one man begins to remember "the pawn shops, the cheap rooming houses, the chill parlors" he detonates a "film grenade" and "explodes the set," The "boys" end the novel by wishing the world dead, the ultimate unsocial protest, and watch the "screen explode in moon craters and boiling silver spots." They see "dim jerky stare blowing away across the empty sky". Having turned as all to ashes, "wild boys smile" (121). All the old creations of the earlier work as well as the new characters, images and settings are introduced in *The Wild Boys*. It consists of the Moroccan wild boys, characters from Inter-zone, Mexican and Mayan stuff, whose roles keep interchanging. The wild boys represent an intentional psychological and social regression; they evade the social controls that underlie our civilization: concepts of God, country, family, and sexuality.

In fact, *The Wild Boys* portrays the degraded America of Burroughs' youth and hence he imagines a group of boys who would breakdown the current social order in near future. Behind the novel, is the voice of Burroughs' himself, whose characters protect against the repressive civilization, Thus, the author succeeds in attacking the society vicariously and satirically. The outrageous desire of freedom manifest in the words of wild boys:

We intend to march on the police machine everywhere. We intend to destroy the police machine and all its records; we intend to destroy all dogmatic verbal systems. The family unit and its cancerous expansion into tribes, countries, nations we will eradicate at its vegetable roots, we don't want to hear any more family talk, mother talk, father talk, cop talk, priest talk, country talk or party talk. To put it country simple we have heard enough bullshit (139-40).

This excerpt from the narrative suffices to show that the time of the wild boys' action is associated only with the future. The book is a futuristic fantasy stating that one can liberate oneself at least by forgetting and going out of mind. The construction of the plot is based on an eternal battle between good and evil forces clearly distinguished from each other. Each and every story that makes up the novel is a fragmented one with the continually developing and unending myth. On the one hand, freedom and peace are being threatened by the evil force of control and on the other - the outrageous generation, in its attempt to curb such forces is adopting the destructive measures. Because, they themselves are being caught by various control viruses whose survival depends on the host and for whom the ultimate is death, but are not conscious of it.

The Wild Boys have never seen the faces of women or heard their voice before and as they are free of birth or death; can be called immortal. They exist through the practices of the cult who represent the release of demonic energy in conscious fantasy. For Burroughs, this is a means for individual liberation and hence a way for the evolution of a new society. In *William S Burroughs*, Jennie Skerl observes;

The Wild Boys does not describe this new world; it ends on a note of conflict and disintegration as an unidentified narrator attempts to break conventional time barriers and joins the wild boys in the fictional future... Thus the barrier between the present and Burroughs' futuristic fantasy is not only the predicted collapse of our civilization but the biological and temporal barrier between life and death. (83-84)

On the whole, the second mythology also has been constructed with the same purpose, it shows the writer's quest for complete liberation from all sorts of bondage, which has not been achieved. He continues to suggest the ways and means through the trilogy and *The Wild Boys*, which, no doubt, add credits to his imaginative power. He proposes to escape, but fails to materialize it. On the contrary, the same desire has given rise to energy - the demonic energy of the wild boys - who are the characters of his fantasy. After all it cannot be denied that this existing evil force, conflict and disintegrations are a part of the reality film of the world. The same because the subject-matter for the writers who wanders in an imaginary world of peace; and power their emotion into the fantastical composition. Burroughs has also attempted to create a fantasy of freedom by developing a new mythology representing the different authoritative groups of society. The fact is the reality and fantasy is two opposite poles; hence, the author is once again trapped by the consciousness-bondage of fantasy and imagination and has become momentarily unconscious of the reality - the present.

To conclude, *the wild boys* is a successful expressionistic work of Burroughs whose imaginative power has no end. His obsessive and orgiastic experiences during drug addiction and withdrawal period have widened his visionary outlook. So far, he has been able to develop new mythologies and the technique which is found in the wild boys too. But, apart from the orderly arrangement of the sequences as well as the fewer cut-ups, not much significant change or addition it made to it. *The wild boys* only remains a futuristic fantasy for the reader and the need is for the visual achievement, which is yet again a fantasy, The book only appears to be a guide of pre-planned activities of the control registers and the result is being awaited through action.

REFERENCES

1. Burroughs, William. *The Wild Boys*. New York: Grove Press, 1982.
2. Hendin, Josephine. "The Wild Boys by William Burroughs." *Saturday Review* 1971.
3. Rathee, H. (2018). *Exploring History and Culture: A Study of William Dalrymple's City of Djinns*.
4. McLuhan, Marshall. "Notes on Burroughs." *The Nation* 28 (1964): 517-519.
5. Sathikumari MK, Joshua DD. *Mingling of People, Culture and Religion in William Dalrymple's White Mughals*.
6. Morgan, Ted. *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs*. New York: Henry Holt, 1998.
7. Palmer, Robert. *Rolling Stone Interview: William S. Burroughs*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
8. Skerl, Jennie. *William S Burroughs*. Boston: Twayne, 1985.

